

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

161608Z Feb 06

UNCLAS AMMAN 001174

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT APPROVES BUDGET AMIDST
CONTROVERSY

REF: AMMAN 1118

1. (SBU) The Chamber of Deputies on February 15 approved the GOJ's budget for 2006 (reftel) with only minor modifications during a chaotic session marked by a walkout of MPs and a vote by a hurried show of hands. During the full week of debate prior to the vote, 72 out of 110 MPs insisted on exercising their right to address their colleagues - and to grandstand for the media. While MPs mostly focused on economic issues - with many chastising the GOJ and the IMF for alleged insensitivity to the "suffering" of the Jordanian poor - several strayed into topics as diverse as the cartoon controversy, political reform, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the perceived mistreatment of Arabs attempting to enter the U.S.

2. (SBU) When the last of the MPs finished his remarks, the full Chamber turned to considering the formal recommendations of the Financial Committee to modify the budget. According to parliamentary sources, tempers soon flared in the ensuing debate. Influential MP Abdul Karim Al-Dughmi (East Banker, Mafrag), rose to his feet and began yelling after a majority of the Financial Committee's members voted against their own recommendations. Members of the Islamic Action Front (IAF) protested loudly against the parliament's failure to "stand up" to the GOJ on behalf of poor Jordanians. Prime Minister Bakhit, in an attempt to appease MPs, reportedly promised to refrain from a further hike in fuel prices without consulting parliament, and pledged to establish a social safety net to help Jordanians of limited income cope with rising fuel costs. NOTE: News reports indicate Bakhit stated that the next fuel price hike would occur "after winter," which tracks with post's understanding that the GOJ planned the next increase for March, 2006. END NOTE.

3. (SBU) Prior to the final vote on the budget, 33 MPs - including all 17 IAF members - stormed out of the Chamber assembly room in protest. Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali then called on the rump of 75 MPs to raise hands in favor of the budget. Without bothering to take a count, Majali quickly declared that a majority had approved the budget and immediately ended the day's session. NOTE: Journalists present for the vote estimated that around 68 of the 75 voted in favor of the budget. END NOTE. Contacts report that many MPs, even those who strongly supported the budget, were irate with Majali for his management of the vote. The GOJ's budget now heads to the palace-appointed Senate where it will likely be given a quick stamp of approval.

HALE